

10/08/09 02:32 PM ET

House lawmakers want the Federal Communications Commission to help bring down the volume of television commercials.

The House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet on Thursday approved a bill that would prohibit television commercials from being excessively loud. The FCC would be required to come up with recommended volume levels for commercials. Broadcasters, TV stations and cable and satellite providers would then have one year to purchase the necessary equipment to temper noisy ads.

"All of us have had the experience of enjoying a favorite program only to find ourselves scrambling for the remote control at the commercial break," said Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), chairman of the subcommittee.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.), includes waivers for smaller stations and programming operators that can show they cannot afford the equipment. Some Republican members of the panel, including ranking member Cliff Stearns of Florida, say it is difficult to regulate volumes, since commercials are produced by a number of studios and companies that use different technologies and volume standards.

"Shows and movies have a dynamic sound range to cover everything from a quiet scene to an explosion," he said. "Commercials, meanwhile, tend to have a narrow sound range. Volume levels are typically set for the programming, which can throw off the volume levels for commercials."

It was one of four bills the panel moved easily by voice vote in less than an hour.

The committee also approved a bill that would make it illegal for telephone fraudsters to misrepresent their identities on caller ID functions.

A third bill, introduced by Rep. Mike Doyle (D-Pa.) and Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.), amends existing laws to allow new low-power radio stations to operate within a closer range of full-power stations. Currently, low-power stations are restricted from operating too close to a full-power station due to interference concerns. As a result, there are few low-power stations to provide

local content to listeners.

The final bill approved by the panel would extend by two years access to federal grants for public safety agencies to deploy interoperable communications systems. This is intended to give first responders more time to comply with the grant program requirements.

The government is currently authorized to grant up to \$1 billion to public safety agencies by Sept. 30, 2010.

